



# Juliana Pegues

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*I write because I have to. It is as much of me as breathing, eating, sleeping. It is my sustenance. I can't imagine not writing. I put my writing out to others for other reasons. Because I believe in the power of ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. And I believe that the struggle for social change is not merely an intellectual exercise but something our hearts engage in. Therefore, creative expression becomes one of the most powerful tools to empower others and work for justice. I also believe artistic expression comes from deeply personal places. My writing is shaped by my identity, the communities I come from and move through. In that way, I write for people of Asian ancestry, I write for Asian Americans, I write for Asian American women, I write for queers, I write for mixed race folks, and I write for people of color. Having this focus is my way of keeping personal integrity and keeping my writing real.*

— Juliana Pegues, email interview, 22 July, 2002

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## Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1969
- \* Asian-American spoken word artist, poet, and author
- \* Mixes politics, activism, and art in her writing

This page was researched and submitted by: Kaia Hemming and Ncha Xiong on 7/26/02.



# Juliana Pegues

## Biography

Juliana Pegues— writer/poet/spoken word artist/activist/feminist/queer/person of color/Asian American/actor/artist/performer— incorporates the views from all groups she identifies with into her writing. She started keeping journals at age eight, and at age nine she wrote her first poem. Although she doesn't have a book of her own work published, she has pieces in numerous anthologies. She has written work for the page as well as work for the oral tradition through performance/spoken word pieces.

Juliana Pegues/Pei Lu Fung was born in Taipei, Taiwan, on August 7, 1969 (Leo, year of the Rooster). When she was three and a half, her family moved to Alaska, where she lived until she left for college. Her mother is Chinese and her father is Caucasian. She has a younger brother and sister. As she was growing up, her mother spoke and taught her the Mandarin and Cantonese dialects of Chinese. Unfortunately, by the age of 12 she lost the language.

In high school, Pegues was voted “most likely to succeed” and attended the University of Redlands in California. While at school, she organized her first protest, which began the active political career she has pursued throughout life. She started by getting involved in peace, women's, and environmental causes. Pegues delved deeply into these political causes and found she was not paying as much attention to her schoolwork. After two years of college, she dropped out and moved to Seattle where she became hooked on politics and identified as a radical. Besides Seattle, Pegues has lived in San Francisco, Boston, Minneapolis, and Portland, ME. She views herself as self-educated academically and community-educated politically. As a writer/spoken-word artist, this political activism became the core to her writing and Pegues uses her words as activism for social change:

“My writing would definitely not be the same if I was not engaged in politics. I don't think it would have the same depth. I also think there is an interrelationship between knowing yourself and locating your identity and experiences in the world around you. In an indirect way this synergy between personal and political makes me a better thinker and learner which ultimately affects my ability to be a better writer (Pegues, email interview, 22 July 2002).”



# Juliana Pegues

## Biography continued

The bulk of Pegues' work is autobiographical and personal and concerns issues affecting her as a politically active queer woman of color. Her published works have been included in *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire*, *The Very Inside: An Anthology of Writing by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbian and Bisexual Women*, *Sojourner*, and numerous other anthologies and online sites.

Throughout Pegues' writing, her strong passion for social change is as evident as it is through her community involvement. She mixes politics, art, and activism in her writing to create a fresh, direct voice. Pegues currently lives in Minneapolis and some of the organizations Pegues is currently involved in include Guerilla Wordfare, Asian American Renaissance, Women's Prison Book Project, and the Garment Workers Justice Campaign.

In her writing, she addresses issues of politics, feminism, sexuality, race, and identity whether in an academic paper published online, an essay, a poem, or a spoken word piece. However, it is the way that she approaches these issues through her writing that shows her versatility and proves she doesn't fit into only one genre.

An early piece published by Pegues is "White Rice: Searching for Identity." This autobiographical piece moves from her early days at college to a more current setting. It crosses genres as the moods of the piece change in a combination of essay/memoir, prose, and poetry. Focusing on Pegues' struggle to find an identity as a mixed-race queer Chinese woman, this piece brings in issues of family, identity, sexuality, and race. She addresses these issues and honestly attempts to understand how they affect her individuality.

In "Strategies from the Field: Organizing the Asian American Feminist Movement," Pegues also writes in mixed genres. The piece is an essay; however, she uses some storytelling/flashbacks to illustrate her struggles in leftist political groups as an Asian American queer feminist. She addresses the stereotypes of Asian American women and the exoticism she and other politically active women have encountered.



# Juliana Pegues

## Biography continued

She also discusses the struggle in identifying between issue based, identity based, and issue based identity political groups (an “issue based” group would be a feminist group, an “identity based” group would be an Asian American group, and an “issue based identity group” would be an Asian American feminist group. ) The problem is how to fit in their political agendas without being marginalized or seen as the “model minority.”

Her one-person performance piece “Fifteen” was performed in Minneapolis at Intermedia Arts Center in February 2002. “Fifteen” addresses the issue of women in prison from a political and feminist perspective. The piece begins with a “truth” about Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz and the kinds of legal ramifications she would have encountered as a contemporary woman of color in American society. Different female characters are embodied throughout the piece as prisoners serving time for a variety of reasons. Their voices are heard addressing issues of imprisonment, sexuality, politics, violence, and family.

Juliana Pegues is a revolutionary Asian American writer. She collects her political views and experiences and ties them together through her writing and performances. She truly uses art as activism to build community. Her words are combative words to fight social injustice. Her spoken word pieces are engaging events intended to create activism for an audience. “I love writing for the page, but ultimately I believe that art is a community endeavor and spoken word is a tremendous expression of that collective experience. Spoken word is also more accessible and belongs more fully to communities. And always, always, a poem reaches more people than a diatribe” (Pegues, email interview, 22 July 2002).

Pegues’ involvement in spoken word performance began with her involvement in stage performance and street theater in the early 1990s. These activities, combined with the poetry and hip-hop scenes she engaged in, eventually led other artists to invite her to participate in spoken word performances. Spoken word has become a powerful tool of expression, creating a movement of poets throughout the 1990s.

Spoken word stems from poetry in the oral tradition, when poets and storytellers traveled reading their work before technology allowed for making copies of their writing. Oral tradition allowed them more accessibility to their audience. The roots of oral tradition have cultural ties with African American as well as Native American cultures.



# Juliana Pegues

## Biography continued

“As an artist in the “spoken word” scene, it is necessary for me to acknowledge that this art genre has strong hip-hop connections and roots. And because of that, as with all hip-hop art forms, it is necessary for me to pay respects to the Black and Puerto Rican roots of hip-hop. At the same time, I think that Asian Americans, as well as all people of color around the globe, have a place in adding our voices to hip-hop. Not to appropriate or steal, but to genuinely develop our own voice within hip-hop. I get real irritated with this notion that hip-hop has “transcended” race and class because I think that is just a smokescreen for the commercialization and the de-politicization of hip-hop. There is a real difference between Sprite ads and Palestinian rappers talking about homeland occupation, between Eminem and I Was Born With Two Tongues (Chicago-based Asian American spoken word group), between theft and respect” (Pegues, email interview, 5 August 2002).

Pegues currently lives in Minneapolis. In the fall of 2002, a chapbook of her work should be available and she will have a piece published in the upcoming anthology *SING, WHISPER, SHOUT, PRAY! Feminist Visions for a Just World*. She also hopes to produce another one-woman show by 2004.



# Juliana Pegues

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